

Informational Interviews



What is an informational interview? An informational interview is a discussion with someone who is knowledgeable about a specific career field. The person you talk to can be a representative from a firm or agency that employs people in the type of position you are trying to learn about or a person who holds such a position.

What is the purpose of an informational interview? Your objective is to obtain facts and ideas that will help you in making career decisions. Remember that *you* are the interviewer, and your purpose for conducting an interview is to *request information*. An informational interview is *not* the same as a job interview.

What are the benefits of informational interviews? You can...

- Learn about the duties, qualifications, and personality traits required in a career area
- Find out how to best apply your own background or experience
- Learn what types of experience you will need to qualify for a specific position
- Gain knowledge of opportunities available
- Narrow your options
- Learn the jargon and current trends in the field
- Expand your network for future reference

Where should I start? You should always try to contact a specific person. If you do not know an individual who holds the type of job you are interested in, you can contact the Career Services office to obtain names of individuals who may be able to help you. You may also check out PackNet on the Career Services web site to find CALS alumni who are willing to give you information. Additionally, you may be able to have one of your professors arrange an appointment with someone in a career field that interests you.

The initial contact can be made by telephone or email, although telephone contact is more immediate. State your purpose and ask for 15-20 minutes of the person's time.

How should I prepare for the interview? Before you go to your interview, learn as much as you can about the organization by doing some research. You can find information about employers on the web. You should dress professionally for the meeting and arrive 10-15 minutes early. Prepare a list of questions that will help you gain useful information.

What are some questions that I can ask during the interview?

1. How did you become interested in this field or job?
2. What is the best educational preparation for this field?
3. How long have you worked in this job?
4. What are your major responsibilities?
5. Do you work primarily with data, people, or things?
6. What do you like most about your work?
7. What are the major frustrations in this job?
8. What are the opportunities for advancement?
9. How did you gain entrance into this line of work?
10. Which professional journals and organizations should I know about in this field?
11. What skills are needed in the field, and which ones should I be concentrating on at this point in my education?
12. What personal qualities do you feel are needed to begin seeking a job in your field?
13. How would you advise someone to begin seeking a job in your field?
14. Do you know of comparable job titles I should be exploring in this field?
15. Does your organization offer learning opportunities such as internships or summer employment? If so, who should I contact for more information?
16. Would you be willing to critique my resume?
17. Can you recommend someone else for me to talk to in this field? When I call him/her, may I use your name?

What should I do after the interview? Be sure to send a thank you letter to each person you interview. Keep good notes and follow up with any leads that you are given. Make sure you keep a record of the title, address, phone number, and company of each of your contacts. These people are now part of your career network!